this one's for the torn-down, the experts at the fall

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by hujwernoo

Summary

It’s been six months. Six months since the end of the world, the end of Klaus. Six months since Klaus became a ghost, and six months since Five popped out of the timestream into the end of the world. Six months since Klaus realized he’d have to uselessly watch as his little brother takes a double-black-diamond crash course in post-apocalyptic survival, and made his decision to stick around and give (unheard, mostly unfollowed) advice.

There have been other milestones, as well. It’s been five and a half months since Five found the library that is now his home base. Four months since he brought Delores back and made her his creepy mannequin-wife. Three months since he switched entirely to drinking alcohol, which makes him the second-youngest alcoholic in the history of the Family Hargreeves. Six weeks since he actually started constructing that winter shelter he’s been muttering about for months. One week since he broke his leg when he misjudged the stability of a pile of scrap and couldn’t jump away in time.

Two days since he ran out of food.

Notes

I finally bowed to my inner muse (pushy bitch) and made a sequel. I hope you enjoy it!

- Translation into Français available: TRAD - this one's for the torn-down, the experts at the fall by Loclo4

It's been six months. Six months since the end of the world, the end of Klaus. Six months since Klaus became a ghost, and six months since Five popped out of the timestream into the end of the world. Six months since Klaus realized he'd have to uselessly watch as his little brother takes a double-black-diamond crash course in post-apocalyptic survival, and made his decision to stick around and give (unheard, mostly unfollowed) advice.

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"Okay, I get it's a problem but *you should not be moving on that leg,*" Klaus insists, hands flapping at Five as his most stubborn brother (and that is a *high* bar) maneuvers himself into the wagon. "Seriously, that was a bad break, Five, you shouldn't go out. And this is *me* talking, so when *I* say it's a bad idea *you should not go out.*"

Five, the asshole, doesn't listen. It's just like old times.

Klaus pulls on his hair and growls. It's not that he doesn't sympathize. He's had a few bad days, when the idea of food seemed the same as the idea of sobriety or losing his powers: laughable and forever out of reach. He knows the creeping, gnawing sensation of the stomach starting to digest itself that Five must be feeling right now. The twitchy, low-grade terror as he realizes over and over again that he doesn't have anything that can stop it, no safety net, no emergency store, *nothing.*

It's not something Klaus would ever wish on his siblings. Much less the tiny, teenage version of Five that sits in front of him now.

But as Five accidentally jostles his leg against the wagon's side and hisses a curse, Klaus can't bring himself to be happy that Five is going out. The break is still fresh, and half-remembered first-aid classes tell Klaus that if Five is still in as much pain as he seems to be after an entire week, something might be wrong with his nerves. That or Five treated it incorrectly, and the idea that Five would allow himself to do anything less than perfectly isn't worth considering.

Five finally started taking painkillers three days ago, and that scares Klaus more than he'd like to admit. On one hand, he's glad Five has some kind of threshold where he's willing to admit he has actual human limits. On the other hand, Klaus is fucking terrified that this might lead to more drugs. He of all people knows how slippery that slope is. Only there's no more people around to call 911, no more ambulances to drive to Five's location, and no more paramedics to restart his heart.

There's also the fact that being doped up on painkillers has apparently convinced Five that he's in good enough shape to go scavenging for more food. He starts rolling the wagon along the cracked asphalt like a bizarre gondola, a silver-handled walking cane serving to push him forward. He has the handle propped up in front of him, laboriously steering around chunks of rubble.

"This is a bad idea," Klaus repeats.

"I'll be back in a few hours, Delores," Five calls out, twisting to face the mannequin positioned on top of a stack of books. Her hand is raised, as if waving goodbye. Five waves in return.

Klaus covers his eyes and groans.

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The first part of Five's scavenging actually goes off without a hitch. Klaus shouldn't be surprised about this, because Five's plans do work more often than not, but Five has been gone for seventeen years so he thinks he can be forgiven for misremembering a few things.

What he hasn't misremembered, however, is Five's tendency to get a swelled head whenever something goes his way. Which means that even after he finds a cache of tinned sardines that will definitely last him for a couple days, Five continues searching.

"Let's go home," Klaus says, without any hope that Five will listen. He wonders if this is what Ben felt like, whenever he tried to bring up rehab, and shoves the thought away. "I know eating fish for the foreseeable future isn't very appealing, and you should definitely pick up those breath mints over there, but you got what you came for. I'm sure Delores is very worried by now."

Five braces himself on the walking stick and hobbles over to a fallen shelf next to a half-collapsed wall of a mostly-collapsed building. He already searched this particular ruin about four months ago, so Klaus isn't quite certain why he's back. Though if he'd gone somewhere unfamiliar Klaus would probably be freaking out over *that,* so maybe he should just count his blessings. There are precious few of them around, after all.

Five carefully lowers himself to the ground next to the shelf, gritting his teeth as his leg stretches out. Klaus is hit with the absurd realization that Five is preventing himself from having any visible reaction to the pain, even though, as far as he knows, there's no one around to see him.

"God, we're so fucked up," Klaus says, and then he nearly falls over because *"Five what the fuck!"*

Five is apparently under the impression that he's *Luther,* because the way he's trying to pull apart the shelf really wouldn't work for anyone but their super-strong and super-irritating brother. The problem is that the shelf is completely metal and probably industrial, and Five is not anywhere near super-strong. He is, in fact, a fourteen-year-old suffering from malnutrition, and his tiny noodle arms completely fail to make a dent in the shelf.

Klaus watches Five for a few minutes longer, eventually he can't hold in his laughter any longer. It's the first time he's laughed since the apocalypse, first genuine laugh in a lot longer than that, and it feels surprisingly good.

"You," Klaus gasps, "look *ridiculous.* I am absolutely telling Delores about this, I hope you know."

Five gives up after another couple attempts, and glares at the shelf. Pointed at a person, that look would be followed by a swift and certain death, but in this situation it just prompts Klaus to laugh harder.

"*Useless,*" Five spits out, looking like he wants to stab the shelf until it's reduced to scrap metal. Klaus wonders if that's possible, because he's pretty sure Five is mad enough to at least consider it. "Fucking *useless.* You shitty, fucking -"

Five struggles to his feet and whacks the wall with his walking stick, moving on to words Klaus didn't even know he knew. Five whacks the wall again, and Klaus realizes that he's having one of his tantrums that comes up whenever reality (or Dad, which was basically the same thing back then) declines to cooperate with whatever he wants to do. Klaus jumps to his feet to enjoy the show, because he always had to run for cover before and seeing it up close has *got* to be entertaining.

Five continues to heap abuse on the poor shelf, which *has* to be industrial-grade material if it can stand up to that level of vitriol, and storms around as best he can on a broken leg, which isn't much. He ends up hitting everything in reach with his cane to compensate, including the shelf, the wall, the ground, the bits of rubble lying close by, and himself once or twice when he makes a particularly clumsy swing. This just spurs him on to newer heights.

Klaus doesn't technically have to breathe, but he finds that he can feel out of breath if he laughs too much. He considers it a worthy trade for the price of seeing this. No wonder Five always drove them away when he was frustrated, if he acts like a cranky toddler who doesn't want to take a nap. Albeit one who knows words no toddler should ever know (Klaus himself doesn't count, the ghosts were a bad influence).

"You know, this just might make the whole ghost thing worth it," Klaus giggles, as Five whacks the wall yet again. A bit of mortar falls out, and Klaus glances up -

Only for his nonexistent blood to turn to ice.

"Five stop hitting that wall right now!" Klaus shrieks, because Five can't see it from his vantage point but *Klaus* can *definitely* see the *enormous fucking slab of stone set to fall on Five if the wall collapses any further.*

Five doesn't listen to him, Five *never* listens to him, and he spits out more curses and punches the shelf and hits it with the cane again, and Klaus is shouting at him about the stone but *he can't hear Klaus,* and he thwacks the wall again and a crack appears and the weight is too much and Five *doesn't notice* -

"Five look out!"

- and Five *throws* himself backwards and the stone comes crashing down, dust and plaster billowing into the air, and Five's bad leg has got to be painful twisted like that and his wrist made a cracking noise when he landed, and he's lost his walking stick, and the wall and the stone only just *barely* missed him, and none of that matters, because Five -

Five is looking directly at him.

"Klaus?"

It's barely a whisper, hardly even counts as an exhalation at all, but it's the loudest sound Klaus has ever heard.

"Five?" he hears himself say, and he can't tear his eyes away from his (small, so small, how were they ever this small) brother, but in his peripheral vision, he realizes that his own hands are glowing blue.

And then he blinks, and the blue vanishes from his fists, and Five's eyes widen. "Klaus? *Klaus!*"

"Five," Klaus manages, but it's no use. Five is looking around frantically, as if Klaus just ducked behind a piece of rubble. "Five, I'm - I'm here, I'm here."

Klaus lifts his hands up in front of his face. He stares at them, remembers the blue glow.

"And I think it's going to be okay."

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